WHAT IS NATO?

The North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington on April 4, 1949, created an alliance of 10 European and two North American independent nations committed to each other's defence.

Four more European nations joined the Alliance between 1952 and 1982, bringing the number of members to 16. The admission of Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland on March 12, 1999 brought the number of members to 19.

NATO's members are: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States.

NATO is an alliance committed to the collective defence of its member countries as the basis for preserving peace and ensuring future security, but, following the momentous changes which occurred in Europe in the 1990s, it has become a catalyst for extending security and stability throughout Europe.

At the core of the Alliance are its member countries. The governments of these countries, meeting together, represent the highest political authorities of the Alliance.

The crisis in Kosovo will be at the top of the agenda of the Summit meeting in Washington. NATO Heads of State and Government will assess the situation with a view to reinforcing the determination of the international community to bring about a lasting political settlement and to create the conditions for the restoration of peace and the safeguarding of the future security of the region.

The Summit will also mark NATO's 50th anniversary. NATO leaders will undoubtedly use the occasion to reaffirm certain fundamental purposes of the Alliance - the safeguarding of the freedom and security of its members, its commitment to the principles of the U.N. Charter, the upholding of democracy and the constant struggle for the peaceful resolution of disputes. The Summit will reaffirm the enduring value of the transatlantic link binding North America to Europe.

It will also be the occasion for consolidating the changes that have been taking place in NATO in the 1990s as it adapts itself to meet the requirements of today's world. These include the enlargement process to take in new members; the reshaping of the Alliance's military structures to enable it to handle new roles in the field of crisis management, peace-keeping and peace-support in the Euro-Atlantic area; and the strengthening of the European role in security matters.

As part of this transformation, NATO is forging a practical partnership with many non-NATO countries with the aim of creating a more transparent Europe in which the scope for misunderstandings and mistrust is reduced.
Central to this idea is the "Partnership for Peace" (PfP) programme which promotes cooperation among the NATO Allies and 24 Partner countries in a vast array of security-related activities.

The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), involving 44 countries including the NATO member countries, provides the political framework for PfP and a forum for discussion on security-related issues. Heads of State and Government from the 44 countries will meet in EAPC Summit session in Washington, on the day following the NATO Summit.

Over the past few years, Russia and Ukraine have developed special independent relationships with the Alliance, enabling them to pursue, in different ways, cooperative programmes on a wide range of practical security-related issues of benefit to their countries and to Europe as a whole. Both countries are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

Russia has suspended its participation in a number of these programmes, following the Alliance's decision to intervene militarily in order to end the conflict in Kosovo. However, NATO is confident that NATO-Russia cooperation in the wider sphere will resume and will continue to develop positively, despite differences over the solution to the crisis. It takes heart from the successful cooperation which has been achieved, first in the Implementation Force (IFOR), and then in the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in many other spheres.

A programme of special cooperation is also being pursued, in the context of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, with six non-NATO Mediterranean countries, aimed at enhancing the security and stability in the Mediterranean region which are linked to security in Europe.

Within NATO itself, committees have responsibility for planning ahead in fields such as political consultations, defence planning and operations, armaments cooperation and others and recommend action to the North Atlantic Council - NATO's highest decision-making body - or to NATO's Defence Planning Committee, which deals primarily with questions relating to NATO's integrated military structure.

Consultations also take place on economic questions related to security, including issues such as defence spending and the conversion of defence industries to civilian purposes.

NATO provides a forum too, for active cooperation among its member states and its Partner countries in areas such as civil emergency planning, disaster relief and scientific and environmental programmes. Although each nation bears the principal responsibility for its own planning to deal with civil emergencies, NATO works to ensure that the civil resources of the Alliance can be used in the most effective way, when the moment requires.

NATO's role here is often a coordinating one. In November 1998, the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordinating Centre (EARDCC), opened just five months earlier, coordinated a relief operation to flood-hit parts of Western Ukraine. Since the deterioration of the situation in and around Kosovo, it has also played a key role in coordinating humanitarian aid from NATO and Partner countries to alleviate the plight of the Kosovar refugees and assist neighbouring countries.

NATO runs a number of international exchange programmes relating to scientific and environmental problems of concern to NATO and Partner countries. These programmes provide support for high-level scientific research, encourage development of national scientific and technological resources, and enable cost savings to be achieved through international collaboration. A number of these activities are designed to tackle defence-related environmental problems, affecting neighbouring nations, which can only be resolved through cooperative action.
THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

The North Atlantic Treaty, itself a very simple document, conforms to the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and derives its legitimacy from the Charter.

In the Treaty, member countries commit themselves to maintaining and developing their defence capabilities, individually and collectively, providing the basis for collective defence planning.

Another part of the Treaty provides a framework for consultations between the member countries, whenever one of them feels that its security is at risk. It is this article which underlines the fundamental importance of the wide-ranging consultation process which takes place within the Alliance and explains why the Alliance is undertaking new missions designed to enhance security in the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole.

Another article - Article 5 - refers to the right to collective self-defence as laid down by the U.N. Charter. It states that an armed attack on one or more members of NATO will be deemed an attack against them all.

The admission of new members to the Alliance is in line with Article 10 of the Treaty which stipulates that other European states in a position to further the principles of the Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area may be invited to accede. Alliance leaders have indicated that the door continues to remain open to other countries in the future.

In other articles of the Treaty, each member country also undertakes to contribute to the development of peaceful and friendly international relations in a number of ways, including by strengthening their free institutions and promoting conditions of stability and well-being. The Treaty also provides for efforts to eliminate conflict in the international economic policies of member countries and to encourage cooperation between them.

The transformation of NATO, following the end of the Cold War and the end of the division of Europe, is aimed at creating increased stability and generating a higher degree of cooperation and mutual trust from which the whole of Europe will benefit.